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THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF TRAGEDY: OEDIPUS THE KNOWER

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Abstract

Aim. The article analyzes the concept of mystery as an ontological matrix of human nature and the phenomenon of existential experience, leading to a conflict between the cognitive intellect and incomprehensible foundation of personal existence. As a model of epistemological-existential conflict mechanism the authors investigate the mythological perception, reflected in the tragedy of Sophocles "Oedipus the King."

Methodology. The analysis of the works of contemporary philosophers, dedicated to the anthropological problem of Oedipus myth, is supplemented by an appeal to the classics of Russian religious philosophy – A. F. Losev and P. A. Florenskiy. It is proved that the formative factor of the ancient tragedy is the conflict between "ousian" and "hypostatic" guilt as a clash of genus and individual. This also defines the situation of self-knowledge crisis in the closed immanent systems of scientific anthropologism, an alternative to which can be the phenomenology of religious mysticism and the principle of enigmatic anti-reductionism as a condition for the possibility of self-identity of a subject. The authors apply to the spiritual verses of Gregory the Theologian, dedicated to the mystery of human nature as an object of existential care and responsibility.

Results. The study concludes that even if total philosophical comprehension of the mystery of human existence is possible, it requires a readiness for a particular spiritual state, a readiness to see not only something ultimate but also something beyond-ultimate with all ontological completeness of noumenal.

Research implications. The possibility of further research of ancient tragedy and myth (with regard to the importance of Sophocles anthropology) and the phenomenon of mystery in the philosophical-anthropological context is envisaged. The epistemological conflict in philosophical anthropology regains relevance in the modern world.

Keywords: enigma, limit of cognition, meaning of life, mystery of being, Oedipus myth, philosophical anthropology, tragedy of a man

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Научная статья

АНТРОПОЛОГИЯ ТРАГЕДИИ: ЭДИП ПОЗНАВШИЙ

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Аннотация

Цель. В статье анализируются понятие тайны как онтологической матрицы человеческой природы и феномен экзистенциального переживания, приводящего к конфликту познающего интеллекта и непостижимого основания личностного бытия. В качестве модели механизма гносеологически-экзистенциального конфликта исследуется мифологическое мироощущение, отражённое в трагедии Софокла «Царь Эдип».

Процедура и методы. Анализ работ современных философов, посвящённых антропологической проблеме мифа об Эдипе, дополнен обращением к классикам русской религиозной философии – А. Ф. Лосеву и П. А. Флоренскому. Доказывается, что формообразующим фактором античной трагедии является конфликт «усийной» и «ипостасной» вины как столкновения рода и индивида. Этим же определена ситуация кризиса самопознания в замкнутых имманентных системах научного антропологизма, альтернативой которым могут стать феноменология религиозной мистики и принцип энигматического антиредукционизма как условия возможности самотождественности субъекта. Авторы исследуют духовные стихи Григория Богослова, посвящённые тайне человеческой природы как объекту экзистенциальной заботы и ответственности.

Результаты. В ходе исследования делается вывод, что даже если полное философское постижение природы человека и возможно, оно требует от постигающего особого духовного состояния, готовности к встрече как с предельным, так и с запредельным во всей онтологической полноте ноуменального.

Практическая и/или теоретическая значимость исследования. Намечается возможность дальнейшего исследования как античной трагедии и мифа (с учётом значимости антропологического наследия Софокла), так и феномена тайны в философско-антропологическом контексте. Гносеологический конфликт в философской антропологии вновь обретает актуальность в современном мире.

Ключевые слова: загадка, миф об Эдипе, предел познания, смысл жизни, тайна бытия, трагедия человека, философская антропология

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Unhappy man! Oh, don't recognize who you are!
Sophocles. "Oedipus the King"

Introduction

The plot of Sophocles' central tragedy is based on one of the cornerstone myths of antiquity. It is based on the path of Oedipus, the son of the Theban king, who was expelled from his native home as a child, adopted by the Corinthian monarch and returned to Thebes as an adult man. On the way there, he kills the Theban king without recognizing him, solves the mysteries of the mystical Sphinx about a man at the gates of the city, and, arriving in the city, marries the widowed

queen. Soon, an epidemic breaks out in the city, and the oracle reports that the reason for this is the unavoidable death of the former king. Oedipus vows to find out who this killer is, curses his name and embarks on an investigation. From collision to collision, he unravels the tangle of intrigues, summons oracles and witnesses. Those people, realizing the terrible truth, beg Oedipus to stop and not find out the real state of affairs. However, the mystery beckons Oedipus, the light of truth as a fatefully self-fulfilling idea appeals to the mind,

they are, according to Sophocles, of the same nature, and individual life (βίος) is secondary and accidental in comparison with the faceless element (ζωή). Finally, Oedipus sees the whole chain of cause and effect and realizes that he is the killer. The decoding mechanism of fate that has already been launched can't be stopped. And Oedipus reveals an even deeper secret – the basic meaning of his actions. The king he killed is his father, whom he has not seen since infancy. And the queen he married, the mother of his children, is his own mother. In desperation, Oedipus gouges out his own eyes, as if blocking the way of seeing everything else that is not the truth in comparison with the secret he discovered, and voluntarily goes into exile.

The myth taken as a basis is, of course, broader than its reflection in tragedy, as any mythological core is always more meaningful than the cult that feeds on it, and tragedy is a late cult aspect (the word itself comes from ancient Greek τράγος, “goat” and ᾠδή, “singing”). And Sophocles focuses on the phenomenology of the human more than on the hermeneutics of the mythological. S. I. Radzig notes that the tragedian is not interested in the artistic “edging” of the legend, but “in the experiences of man himself.” “Man” is the most precious thing for Sophocles, and all his works known to us are devoted to this main theme” [1, c. 122]. Thus, following S. I. Radzig, with certain reservations, it can be assumed that Sophocles was the first representative of philosophical anthropology even before the birth of philosophy.

Exploring the myth of Oedipus as a socio-cultural model, A. M. Pyatigorsky poses the following question: “Is a person his own history even before history began?” [2, c. 228]. In other words, is the explicative unfolding of subjective potentiality in the biographical space fully determined, or is freedom allowed? Did Sophocles suspect the existence of a personality? If so, then a person should have freedom of cognitive intentions and can choose what to know about himself and what to discard, where the explication of his biographical content should come from, where the substantial reference “I”, from which

self-knowledge should begin, is. It is worth mentioning that the philosopher comes to the conclusion that the “Oedipus” model of personality is just one of many models, and it is peculiar only to some people (primarily those who go beyond a certain social norm). We will talk about “Oedipus” as the main model of anthropological research, mainly related to the root foundation of human nature, namely– its mystery. The unfolding of the content takes place in the direction of self-knowledge, disclosure and, consequently, destruction of the mystery of self-existence.

Mystery as a category of philosophical anthropology falls into the zone of close attention of modern researchers. Thus, S. V. Shevtsov, analyzing the myth of Oedipus as a model of self-knowledge, proceeds from the ontological inclusion of the subject into the object of knowledge, i.e., a person in his personal history or multidimensional biography, the angle of which he is free to choose, referring to himself from the other side. According to S. V. Shevtsov, a person is essentially located and comprehended in the zone of intersection of imaginary and truth, simultaneously combining these two modes in himself. In anthropological knowledge, “there is a boundary between the blinding brilliance of visibility and the light of the true state of affairs, which, unlike the extraordinariness of secret knowledge (Oedipus’ victory over the Sphinx) and knowledge-power (taking power in Thebes), refers to the metaphysical dimension of man – conscience, responsibility, truthfulness towards oneself” [3, c. 164]. Morality and existence are identified with self-knowledge in human destiny as a concretized universality unfolding over time. Without having true knowledge from the beginning, a person cannot remain in peaceful ignorance without losing his existence. And even if his knowledge does not lead to the desired reliability, but some anthropological fundamentality makes him be active and strive to learn. H. Plesner sees such a fundamental thing in faith: “Whoever longs for home, homeland, and shelter must sacrifice himself to faith. The one who holds on to the spirit does not come back” [4, c. 295]. An eccentric position forces

one to seek one's existence through the eternal mismatch of purpose and result, essential self and enriching freedom. H. Plesner sees in it an apology for the dignity of mind, moving from mistake to mistake in an incomprehensible world which is like a thing-in-itself, the eccentric is attracted to a multivariant future, for the appropriation of which a person creates a project of himself as already-known. And he is always in the process of this creation, self-actualization in otherness, where he obtains knowledge about himself as his position in dramatic reality (from ancient Greek δράμα – action, deed), and on the periphery of everything possible, there is an enigmatic object in the halo of existential anxiety. Absence is present as knowledge of ignorance. This is what can be called *the existential of human mystery*.

Mystery is always disturbing, its main feature as a phenomenon for us is the conflict of self-existence. Once known, it will lose its ontological status, cease to be a mystery, and despite this, it wants to be known. It carries out the “boldness of faith”, the reliance on the saving power of what Goethe calls “Ewig-Weibliche”, calls to be near and, from the perspective of the mysteriously incomprehensible, nevertheless to comprehend the phenomenal world. And it also repels as a transcendental solipsistic apology for agnosticism. At first glance, it may seem that the phenomenology of mystery is absurd, since its existence implies the regression of absolutely any cognitive intention. And yet the mystery, this wonderful veil of existence, which, according to Nietzsche, the artist admires, and the scientist tries to tear it off, in its exposure can destroy both the first and the second. As was the case, for example, with the gifted but self-willed young priest from F. Schiller's poem “The Idol of Isis”, (German “Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais”) who vehemently transgressed the prohibition of prudence.

M. Heidegger paid special attention to the tragedy of Sophocles in its connection with the question of the self-consciousness of a person concerned about the authenticity of being. As A. S. Gagarin writes: “M. Heidegger asserts that in this super-vision of Oedipus,

the main passion of Greek now-existence (German “Dasein”) is revealed – the passion of exposing existence, that is, the struggle for existence itself” [5, c. 48]. This struggle for existence found its manifesto in the Socratic exhortation “know thyself!” and in the Eleatic identification of being and thinking. It is also interesting to compare T. V. Shitsova's approach of M. Heidegger and the representative of psycho-existential therapy R. May because in the early twentieth century, it was common to consider the Oedipus complex as the basic subject of psychoanalysis, and the ontological-existential turn emerged as something new in the sciences of man. According to the researcher, M. Heidegger “defines the tragedy of Sophocles as a poetic depiction of the struggle between being (as non-concealment) and illusion (as concealment and substitution)” [6, c. 92]. Unlike him, R. May carries out a philosophical and anthropological analysis of the myth of Oedipus in the context of questions about the self, self-realization, and “the truth is understood here as the truth of individual existence – the truth that is revealed and which the individual rejects as unbearable” [6, c. 92]. At the same time, the rejection is made back into the sphere of mystery through intentional regression, which, according to M. Heidegger, means the rejection of being. M. Heidegger argues that Sophocles was the first to depict the fate of a man who had comprehended the mystery of himself in the world of blind necessity, and who had identified himself with existence through blinding himself (the finale of the tragedy). His Oedipus looked beyond the wonderful veil, comprehending his own nature, and this plot has been known all over the world for more than two and a half thousand years. Sophocles provides not just a model of the ancient worldview with all its inherent attributes (rock-ananke, pathos, catastrophism, etc.), not just the seed of a structurally and dramatically calibrated discourse about the place of personality in the ocean of the spontaneously impersonal, no matter how the founders of psychoanalysis wanted it, but an integral space of anthropological meanings full of creative and mythological energy of the value-based content of reality called “man.”

It should be established whether an act of self-knowledge is possible as a disclosure of a secret, and what can guarantee that a definitive answer to the question of human essence is possible both without losing what M. Heidegger calls “non-concealment” and with the preservation of a person’s substantial status. The tradition of Russian religious philosophy, and in particular, the discourse of anthropodicy, can serve here as a guideline for substantiating a new philosophical and anthropological interpretation of the ancient myth.

Understanding the fate of a subject who has fully come to know his self can be found in the studies of the classics of Russian philosophical thought – A. F. Losev, P. A. Florensky, N. A. Berdyaev. The anthropological question of the possibility of discovering the mystery of human nature is posed by them in the perspective of the Christian worldview, when comprehension of the ultimate meaning of existence is reduced to comprehension of the essence of the Trinity and the hypostasis of Christ, completing the tragic deed, relieving existential tension at the moment of knowledge of the truth of non-concealment. Divine hope as a saving existential leads a person through transfinite knowledge of the world to self-knowledge, when the external and internal are identified in a personal dimension. The ignorance of a tragically determined individual no longer needs the saving darkness, when “men loved darkness more than light, because their deeds were evil” (Jn: 3: 19), since the path to the meaning of tragedy of overcoming the deterministic fate, to the meaning of freedom is indicated. But for A. F. Losev, P. A. Florensky, and N. A. Berdyaev, the dialectics of two worlds is also important, one of which is extremely true, but given, the second is imaginary, but given, and between which, being defined through them, a person stands as an existential mystery that should connect these worlds, transform them and through this receive his own justification (anthropodicy).

Towards the anthropology of tragedy

The engine of human tragedy, from the point of view of ancient thinkers, is the dramatic tension of his duality with a simultaneous striving for freedom as the dignity of a cognizing subject and, at the same time, the desire to preserve cosmic order (from ancient Greek “κοσμέω” – “to arrange”, “to decorate”), the instance of which completely determines the fate of the individual while relieving him of responsibility. The second outcome is possible only if the individual accepts his place in the socio-cosmic space and submits to the common. But Sophocles’ intuition told him that this subordination initially requires self-knowledge for the possibility of self-identification (“know thyself”), and it leads to the first outcome, to the drama of cognition. In other words, self-knowledge is realized in the process of moving towards a goal, and since this goal is a benefit as a common being, an individual has to be defined through something else or something particular relative to the common, and, therefore, through the existential experience of non-existence. Sophocles did not think in terms of the generic curse of all mankind, “original sin,” which, although felt by a single person as a kind of incompleteness and probably doom, is not realized, is not solved. The meaning of such a tragic situation, which in Christian thought is expressed in the redemptive sacrifice of God, was not revealed to him either. But this does not lead him to the conclusion that life is absurd, because since it has the dignity of a freely cognizing mind, there is also a meaning to existence, given as a mystery.

P. A. Florensky was one of the first in Russian philosophy to turn to the dialectics of ancient Greek tragedy, as it was understood by ancient authors, seeking in it the origins of his anthropodicy, specifically the religious justification of man. In Europe, F. Nietzsche is engaged in rethinking the ancient tragedy, however, he justifies not a human, but a kind of biosocial obligation. Nevertheless, such attention to the same subject turns out to be quite fair, and the evolution of views is consistent, since “turning to the terms of

Nietzschean aesthetics, P. A. Florensky leaves behind the “biological man” and introduces the “tragic man” into his anthropology. This is a natural metamorphosis of his science of man: in the order of nature (namely, it is the sphere of P. A. Florensky’s research), human existence is tragically hopeless” [7, c. 102]. P. A. Florensky notes that tragedy has at its root the guilt in its essence (ουσία), not solved in essence, not recognized and tormenting with the secret meaning of its presence. In other words, it is a kind of mark, a seal, a generic sign of all mankind, an existential in which everyone is equated with everyone. Identified guilt, according to P. A. Florensky, leads to the ultimate knowledge of human nature, but this knowledge, firstly, is inconvenient and painful, and secondly, requires detachment from the world, which is symbolized by Oedipus’ blindness as a knower, “he is a soothsayer (μάντις), but this violent gift bothers him.” [8, c. 175].

In the tragedy of Sophocles, the fullness of knowledge of one’s own nature was fulfilled to the end. The ancient consciousness understands the finality of an act when it is no longer possible to remain within the familiar boundaries of phenomenal existence. Oedipus should have frozen, not to exist, because he knew, *to know*, in his case, excludes *to exist*. But knowledge does not free from action, and action does not free from error. Hence one of the possible outcomes: the motive of the action could be self-conscious and conscious imprudence. Trying to speak out against it means following the lead of reason, even if it is a categorical imperative. But P. A. Florensky, inheriting the traditions of Christian Neoplatonism, is trying to rethink the evangelical question – whether what is unreasonable and unfair from the point of view of a man is the truth from the point of view of divine reason? An attempt to know a person by a rational scientific positivist method leads to a search for justice. So Oedipus follows the path of human justice, although he does not realize that Ananke, the deity of inevitability, is leading him. The tragic fault of Oedipus is that he is a man of knowledge and knowledge cannot stop. His life with his own

mother, Jocasta, is a life in the world of original sin, which is symbolized in the tragedy by an epidemic, a miasma (from ancient Greek μίαισμα – “filth”). And if a person wanted to justify himself, he would have to find a victim in the ancestral curse, in the corruption of humanity as such, which P. A. Florensky talks about, and to find peace in inertia. That is, Oedipus would have to renounce the knowledge of truth. But this is impossible – deep in human nature, there is an awareness of personal responsibility for the ancestral curse caused by the voice of conscience. He cannot renounce knowledge with consent to the eternal filth of imaginary things, he must accept his own existential guilt as one who knows the secret of self-existence, affirming the uncovered by the principle of life itself. The meaning of human self-knowledge, which remains a sacred mystery to Sophocles, is obvious to P. A. Florensky’s Christian worldview – it is the ascent to God through the knowledge of both guilt and the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, the ascent through knowledge as love.

Thus, in the tragic worldview, the personal principle (Latin “persona” – the mask of an actor) is a hero capable of performing free actions (the beginning of movement and becoming) that run counter to the mechanically arranged whole, initially embedding and determining him, and the generic principle (the beginning of being) is represented by what Aristotle calls a “chorus” [9, c. 168] – an instance representing the total norm, the cosmic order. The tragedy is born out of the hero’s opposition to cosmic determinism, expressed through dialogue with the chorus. The transfer of a personality trait to the genus could become the justification of a man and the condemnation of humanity (“I create filth because Adam sinned”), that is, in the language of P. A. Florensky’s anthropology, the justification of “hypostasis” (ὑπόστασις), the condemnation of “being” (ousia) (ουσία). But the guilt of being, according to religious consciousness, is the beginning of generic existence, its formal realization, a way of manifestation, and humanity must defend its inviolability as a source of life. This means that, according to the natural desire of affir-

mation, the genus, defending itself, enters into a struggle with the individual, the common wins the right of legitimacy from the particular, which in contrast to the ousia is hypostasis. Translating the above into the language of ancient tragedy, P. A. Florensky concludes: "In the struggle for the imaginary hypostatic guilt of the hero and the chorus, the essence of tragedy is: every tragedy is a clash of concepts about ousia and hypostasis, about the guilt of being and the guilt of meaning. But this collision is insoluble, and therefore the tragedy is hopeless" [7, c. 135]. However, despite the hopelessness, it is not meaningless, that is, comprehension of the essence, which is the dramatic engine of existence, leads to the revelation of the phenomenon of mystery as an uncovered epiphany in order to atone for the ousian guilt.

Meaning arises when there are limits within which being is captured, and which allow us to talk about the whole, separated from the infinite. The limits of the human are opposed to the infinite, and in this opposition, according to A. F. Losev, in the ancient worldview, *"the whole world is a tragic whole*. In it, as we have seen, is the bliss of a self-contemplating and self-revolving mind; therein lies the disintegration of this movement of the mind, through various celestial spheres, all the way to Earth, where under the Moon there is already mainly the realm of necessity and where we find both irregularities in the movement of bodies and the absence of a smooth and calmly joyful radiance of ideal essences and forces in the stars. Crime is eternally committed in the world, guilt is eternally redeemed and overcome; and the cathartically enlightened, blissful primordial energy of the universal essence of the mind is eternally shining" [10, c. 679]. In this "realm of necessity," sacrifice can only have the quality of judgment and justice, but not love and the acquisition of the Other, which is still a means, not an end. However, sacrifice is the first step to freedom, even without gaining meaning, but already an attempt to overcome faceless cosmological mechanism, when the hero's response to the chorus is carried out through overstepping the norms, and in it the limit of oneself and

the beginning of the Other are comprehended. A. F. Losev observes such an ontological picture in the myth of Oedipus: "A crime is necessary related to the birth or death of one or another living being. There must be a crime that somehow puts life itself at stake All this, however, is done in the highest sense unconsciously. If the criminal really knew and remembered what he is and what his victim truly is, then, of course, he would never have been able to commit any crime" [10, c. 667]. A. F. Losev emphasizes the dialectics of tragedy, in which ignorance leads to crime, that is, a catastrophic turn, and it, in its turn, leads to knowledge. A criminal who knows his guilt experiences such a feeling/passion (*πάθος*), that in this world (life, society, politics) nothing can hold him back anymore. Crime and purification through tragic passion (*πάθος*) are the acts of the triumph of eternal meaning over the facts or "matter" of everyday life, which for him turns out to be a temporary means of self-disclosure. In the case of tragedy, these facts are the fate of a person who dared to embody the meaning (myth) in its entirety and staged a rebellion of the immanent self against the transcendent otherness, who found himself "in isolation from himself and from the mind" [10, c. 667] as the absolute source of all forms and meanings.

The universal essence of the mind, as A. F. Losev calls it (P. A. Florensky's "ousia"), here opposes the individual's self-integrity. But the self is characterized by an eccentric position, and precisely due to the fact that the actual being is decentered in the process of self-rebellion, the ontological project goes into its own other, into the sphere of mystery, where it no longer belongs to the projecting subject, where the personality loses itself in the search for meaning. M. M. Bakhtin pays special attention to the issue of individual decentralization, arguing that the problem of the limit in a person's self-knowledge correlates with the issue of reaching out to the Other, to establishing a dialogical connection with him. But not through coercion, as in the case of Aristotle's intelligent and totally normalizing all cosmic particulars prime mover, but through love. M. M. Bakhtin correlates the constitution of a

person in existence through remembrance of him, through a lover: "From the point of view of self-experience, the semantic immortality of the spirit is intuitively convincing, from the point of view of my experience of the Other, the postulate of the immortality of the soul becomes convincing, that is, the inner certainty of the Other – the inner face of his (memory), beloved in addition to meaning" [11, c. 133]. The semantic whole of a person is not comprehended by himself, but is possible when looking at himself through the world, that is, from the perspective of the Other, because "I as a subject never coincide with myself: I am the subject of an act of self-awareness – I go beyond the content of this act" [11, c. 132]. The principle of perspective-visual "out of position" allows a person to know himself at any given moment from something another, which was originally non-being and which became part of the personality in the process of introspection. This can be called the first approach to the mystery. But this another is not a mystery, because it is comprehensible to the Other, and the mystery is fundamentally different from any anthropological dimension.

A secret that cannot be revealed

Anthropologist and Hellenic historian Jean-Pierre Vernant, exploring the palette of meanings of "Oedipus the King" as a tragedy of the ambivalence of human fate, comes to the conclusion that the mystery of man is fundamentally incomprehensible. He writes: "The viewer of the tragedy is offered a kind of premise: man is not a being that we can describe or define; he is a problem, a mystery, whose double meanings we will never be able to decipher" [12, p. 480]. According to J. P. Vernant, in tragedy, it is not truth that collides with non-truth, but a multitude of truths, and the motive of fate presupposes not a hierarchy, but a pluralistic world structure in which all positions are equal, but it is impossible to go beyond one's limits in the act of knowing the other.

However, one can challenge J. P. Vernant's judgment, since Sophocles' hero nevertheless learns the truth, and the point is not that it is

impossible to decipher a person's riddle, but that one must *be prepared* for this – this is no longer an epistemological, but a spiritual task of philosophical anthropology. N. A. Berdyaev also speaks about this: "Anthropological philosophy does not deal with the fact of a man as an object of scientific knowledge (biological, psychological or sociological), but with the fact of a man as a subject of higher self-awareness, with a fact outside nature and outside the world. Therefore, this philosophy recognizes human nature as an image and likeness of absolute being, as a microcosm, as the supreme center of being and sheds light on the mysterious duality of human nature" [13, c. 66]. Religion, metaphysics, and the natural science method have the necessary potential for knowledge, but the question is: is a person *ready* for the truth about himself? This is not an issue of ethics, but an issue of what is extremely possible, it is an existential problem. As A. S. Gagarin notes, in the ancient worldview, "a wise man is not an intelligent, prudent man (φρόνιμος), but a wise man (σοφός), initially cunning, and later ignoring his own benefit, and turning to human values" [5, c. 50]. That is, in fact, sacrificing himself to endow existence with a cosmically ordered meaning. The sacrifice of the tragic hero finds a new meaning in the spiritual search of the first fathers of the church, and for Christian thinking, drama is transferred from the stage to the temple action, where a person strives to restore the integrity of his nature. Thus Gregory the Theologian, in one of his spiritual verses, discussing the meaning of human existence as a kind of purpose, writes, as if retelling the divine plan:

"May he be Heaven
The Wise mystery man, the great lord of the earth,
and the new
Angel from dust, witness of My mind and
greatness!"¹

Here, the word "mystery man" expresses the Christian understanding of the original meaning of human existence – to witness and fully

¹ Григорий Богослов. Избранные творения. М.: Сретенский монастырь, 2008. С. 381.

contemplate entities, to give them names and through this to know them, translating them into a new ontology – into the existence of an unhidden mystery. Having partaken of the fruit of knowledge, he moves from the energetic and symbolic (naming) quality of an “angel of dust” to the tragic attainment of a limit, becoming a measure of being in what M. M. Bakhtin, pointing to sacrifice in the name of self-discovery, calls “love beyond meaning.” Being determined, a person loses the ability to comprehend full knowledge, faced with the ontology of non-existence. Gregory the Theologian continues on this point:

“But full knowledge –
It’s good for the successful, while it’s bad for the
inexperienced.,
Similarly, adult food is always difficult for
infants.”¹

That is, Oedipus’ knowledge of who he is, what kind of humanity is hidden in him as a mystery that combines everything human in general, is a complete fundamental knowledge of the beginning and the end, the meaning of the limits. Full knowledge is an introduction to the mystery of appearing from nothing, being from non-being, which is the mystery of the limit, that is, death. Comprehending this enigma, realizing it, is overcoming death, since it is possible to draw any conclusion about the nature of this mystery only after passing through the act of comprehension, but remaining in being, occupying a superposition outside the binary opposition of “one/the other” or “life/death”, and holding in it the unhidden mystery, undestroyed by knowledge. That is, dying does not end, as is assumed by the Christian hope expressed in the Akathist in the following lines: “Jesus, you have clothed us in our flesh, and by your death you destroy the power of death; Jesus, you deify us with Your Divine Mysteries.”²

The mystery of eternal life retains its ontological relevance only through the knowledge of death, not as its limit, but as a transition, like Hegel’s *Aufhebung*. The dialectics of religious anthropology suggests that a person, committing an act of self-restraint, by accepting the “fruit” of knowledge, is born for a new quality – for mortality (limitation). After all, he could not have learned about this quality without gaining the right to this knowledge, without taking it upon himself as his quality. Comprehending one’s own mortality not as a limit beyond which there is non-being, but as a transition to a new quality of being, requires special responsibility, and this is possible only for the “successful” who have acquired the proper time in which self-knowledge matures. Gregory the Theologian compares tragically limited comprehension to the premature discovery of his essence by Adam (Oedipus), who was skilled in mysteries.

He tasted the sweet fruit recklessly before its due
date,
And he clothed himself in fat flesh, in clothes
made of leather,
Fallen into decay.³

The tragically extreme antique worldview grows not from the mystery of the transition, but from the mystery of the limit, which is characteristic of the ancient aesthetics as a whole. Oedipus, becoming Jocasta’s husband, is given an inappropriate status, brings pestilence, that is, filth, and, in the end, pays for the ultimate knowledge of the truth, which is the essence of tragedy. What Christian thought calls the guardian of paradise, the fire of the Archangel sword, which does not let the unworthy pass through, the ancient myth is symbolized by the riddle of the Sphinx about human nature. Oedipus solves it, and the desacralization of human nature leads him to assimilate his own essence as a fatal horror. The chronotope of the drama contains a limit, which is the actor’s mask (Latin “persona”), which plastically defines the possible cognition of the essence. First, the king wears

¹ Григорий Богослов. Избранные творения. М.: Сретенский монастырь, 2008. С. 384.

² Акафист божественным страстям Христовым [Электронный ресурс] // Православная энциклопедия «Азбука веры»: [сайт]. URL: <https://azbyka.ru/days/caa/596> (дата обращения: 13.06.2018).

³ Григорий Богослов. Избранные творения. М.: Сретенский монастырь, 2008. С. 384.

a mask, then the royal robes fall off, and exposure leaves the face of a lonely knower in the face of inevitability. Further, the episode with the gouged eyes is too clear to dwell on. More interesting now seems to be the act of self-exile of the “enlightened” king from Theban society. It is a symbol of depriving a person of a “heavenly” state, and it is also a rejection of a mystery that he is no longer suitable for contemplating. A person receives a new quality, characterized by the existential loneliness of the exile. Man, a “social animal” (ζῷον πολιτικόν Aristotle), being deprived of the status of “social”, ceases to be a man, but something like a beast. J. P. Vernant examines in detail the tradition of “pharmakos”, that is, exiled in ancient society, and concludes that “in his solitude, he <Oedipus> acts simultaneously as a subhuman, a beast, a wild monster and a man bearing a formidable religious quality – a daimon.” [12, p. 481].

What is this new quality of a person who has learned the secret (before the deadline, not ready for it), called a daimon? The study of the concept of “δαίμων” in Sophocles, made by E. V. Alymova, shows its relationship with the concept of “μοῖρα”, that is, “share.” A daimon is a kind of super-being that distributes a person’s share [14, c. 21], a personalized quality of an individual, the ability to choose, however, not yet immanent to the person himself, but entrusted to divine fate: “if μοῖρα is a share or what is given to the lot, what is given once and for all, then δαίμων is the one who distributes, gives shares. Μοῖρα is not located somewhere outside the person to whom it is destined, on the contrary, it is his self. In other words, μοῖρα becomes the nature of a man, his φύσις, which determines his entire existence.” [14, c. 21]. However, in Sophocles,

it is Oedipus who is called a daimon by the chorus, implying that the distributor (δαίμων) and the distributable (μοῖρα) henceforth co-exist in one essence – in a man who knows himself. True self-comprehension from the standpoint of ancient thinking always corresponds to the comprehension of fate, and the one who is trying to comprehend becomes like a demiurge, whose freedom and will completely coincide with comprehension, and while the demiurge is trying to comprehend, he remains in being, but the end of the process of comprehension is whether it is a rejection of it or, conversely, full realization – a meeting with non-existence, with the limit.

Conclusion

Summing up, we can conclude that from the point of view of Sophocles’ philosophical anthropology, it is possible to comprehend the essence of a man only together with the comprehension of the limit, that is, going beyond, where anthropocentric rationalism is not the measure of things. The tragedy “Oedipus the King” is a reflection of the highest intensity of existential experience of the ultimate, endless excitement about eternity, which does not find way out in the human dimension limited by the fatal necessity. Here, a very significant question is posed, but not sufficiently covered in modern philosophical and anthropological research - how can one be prepared to comprehend what a person is? And this is, of course, one of the cornerstone questions of philosophy – are we ready to comprehend the whole mystery of a man completely, with all its depths and heights, and at the same time remain people who are able to understand our organic place in society and the cosmos?

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